

Golden 25

Chapter Twenty-Five: The Grasshopper and the Gourd (Part 2)

"Oh my, our Manager Zhuang is finally back! You're quite the big shot, aren't you? A whole roomful of people are waiting for you."

As soon as Zhuang Rui stepped into the pet store, he heard Liu Chuan shouting loudly. Looking into the store, he saw that there were indeed quite a few people inside.

The first person Zhuang Rui saw was naturally Qin Xuanbing. Qin Xuanbing was wearing a large purple sweater today, which made her already fair skin look like jade. Her hair, which was originally tied up, was now loose and draped over her shoulders, giving her a lazy feeling. Even though Zhuang Rui disliked Qin Xuanbing's cold personality, his heart beat faster when he saw her like this.

Qin Xuanbing was playing a tortoise race with Nannan. It was probably Liu Chuan's idea. He caught two tortoises and threw them on the coffee table, letting Nannan play with them. Watching the two tortoises clumsily crawl on the coffee table, Qin Xuanbing and Nannan, the two beauties, were laughing happily. Qin Xuanbing's smile was like a glacier melting in an instant. In Zhuang Rui's eyes, it felt like spring had returned to the earth.

Over time, Qin Xuanbing's family background has become an open secret. She comes from a wealthy family in Hong Kong, whose main business is jewelry and jade. They are well-known throughout Southeast Asia. Compared to her family, Lei Lei's maternal grandfather's business is much less impressive. In terms of assets, reputation, and business projects, they cannot compare.

Seemingly sensing Zhuang Rui's gaze, Qin Xuanbing resumed her cold demeanor. Zhuang Rui scratched his head awkwardly and looked at the others.

Lei Lei was helping customers choose turtles next to several aquariums at the shop entrance. She had grown up in Pengcheng and didn't have any language barriers. She was very open and confident in doing business, and not at all pretentious.

Zhuang Rui turned his gaze back to Liu Chuan. Three men were sitting on the sofa next to him. One was an old man, probably in his sixties, thin but vigorous, with bright and piercing eyes, looking very capable.

The other two were middle-aged men around forty years old, and judging from their clothes, they did not look like customers who were buying things.

Liu Chuan pulled Zhuang Rui over and pointed to the old man, saying, "Zhuang Rui, come here, let me introduce you. This is Manager Lü, the owner of 'Jiyaxuan' next door. He is a senior figure in the Pengcheng antique industry, the president of the Pengcheng Antique Association, and a director of the Jewelry and Jade Association. If you have any questions, feel free to ask Manager Lü."

The old man seemed dissatisfied with Liu Chuan's address. He glared at Liu Chuan and said, "You little brat, I don't deserve to be called Uncle Lü by you. What shopkeeper? You're just a lousy old man."

Liu Chuan seemed used to joking with the old man and didn't mind. He then pointed to two other middle-aged men and said to Zhuang Rui, "This is Mr. Song Jun, the owner of Liuxiangzhai. He's a very busy man who's not often in Pengcheng. This is Brother Wang, the owner of Yudingtang. These two are not only well-known in the Pengcheng antique world, but they are also very famous in the whole of northern Jiangsu Province. When I opened my shop here, these two helped me a lot."

Zhuang Rui quickly nodded and greeted the group, but he was somewhat puzzled. According to Liu Chuan, this middle-aged man was a prominent figure in Pengcheng's antique world. He wondered what Liu Chuan meant by introducing these people to him, as he had never had any connection to this business.

As the saying goes, old people become wiser. Manager Lü seemed to see the hint of doubt on Zhuang Rui's face and said bluntly, "Young Zhuang, we have come uninvited today because we heard that you recently acquired a manuscript by Wang Shizhen of the Qing Dynasty. Many of Wang Shizhen's poems have been passed down, but his manuscripts are very rare. We have no other intention than to see it."

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui immediately understood and glanced at Liu Chuan, who quickly said, "You guys chat, I'll go and greet the guests."

After Liu Chuan finished speaking, he hid far away from Lei Lei. Without asking, it was clear that this guy had a loose tongue and spread the word. Zhuang Rui was secretly glad that he hadn't told this guy about the spiritual energy in his eyes, otherwise the whole world would probably know by now.

"Manager Lü, the two bosses..."

"Young Zhuang, this old man will take the liberty of calling you Uncle Lü." Before Zhuang Rui could finish speaking, he was interrupted by Manager Lü.

"Alright, Uncle Lü, Brother Song, Brother Wang, I did acquire a manuscript before the New Year. Judging from its condition, it should undoubtedly be a rare and valuable ancient book. I also did some research, and the manuscript is Wang Shizhen's Incense Ancestor Notes. As for who wrote it, I can't tell."

Zhuang Rui honestly explained the situation regarding the manuscript. In any case, the manuscript had a clean provenance and no one could take it away. These experts wanted to see it, which would be a good opportunity to clear up his doubts.

"Brother Zhuang, could you show it to us?"

Song Jun, who had a somewhat rugged appearance, said loudly, "You know, the most difficult antiques to preserve are calligraphy and paintings. Works by a master like Wang Shizhen are extremely rare. His original works can probably only be seen in a few major museums. Therefore, they all wanted to see them as soon as possible to see whether they were genuine works by the ancients or fakes."

"Now?? Here??"

Zhuang Rui glanced at the little girl who was having a great time playing and was in a bit of a dilemma. He needed to go home to get the things, and besides, Liu Chuan's shop was bustling with people and quite noisy, not exactly a good place to appreciate antiques.

"Hey, I misspoke. This place isn't really suitable. How about this, if you're free tomorrow morning, take the manuscript to the Jingmingxuan Teahouse next to the market. That's my business too. Let's have a tea tasting and appraisal session, old man. What do you say?"

Although Boss Song has a rugged appearance, he speaks with great tact. His words imply that he still respects Old Master Lü. However, Song Jun's demeanor and speech are very dignified, and he doesn't seem to be an ordinary antique collector.

"I think this will work, but I don't know if Xiao Zhuang will have time tomorrow?" Old Master Song nodded and said.

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to reply, the cricket in his arms suddenly chirped, probably because the temperature in the shop had risen. A thought struck Zhuang Rui: the cricket was nothing special, but the cricket gourd must have some history. He didn't know anything about it, so why not let these gentlemen take a look?

Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui said, "Alright, since Uncle Lü said so, I'll be there on time tomorrow. But Uncle Lü, I just bought a small item at the market that I really like. Could you take a look at it and tell me its age?"

"Hehe, is it a cricket gourd? Take it out and let me see..."

When Manager Lü heard the cricket chirping and saw Zhuang Rui speaking like that, he immediately understood what Zhuang Rui was up to.

When Liu Chuan and Lei Lei heard that Zhuang Rui had bought a cricket gourd, they also gathered around. Even Qin Xuanbing and Xiao Nannan, who were playing with a turtle, were attracted by the cricket's clear chirping.

Zhuang Rui reached out and took out the cricket gourd from his arms, but before he could hand it to Grandpa Lü, Liu Chuan snatched it away. Little Nannan hugged Liu Chuan's leg on the ground, clamoring to play with it.

"Hey Wood, how much did you pay for this thing? What made you suddenly want to play with this? Do you remember when we were kids catching grasshoppers?"

Liu Chuan fiddled with the cricket gourd in his hand for a moment, then handed it to the little girl, clearly not taking it seriously. However, he didn't notice that Grandpa Lü's expression changed slightly.

"I bought it for a thousand dollars. We didn't know anything back then. If we had this, my little blue-eyed general wouldn't have frozen to death back then..." Zhuang Rui replied casually.

"A thousand yuan!!! What's gotten into you again??? Do you know I used to sell these things for 20 yuan each, pick whichever you wanted? Which bastard sold them to you? Tell me, I'm going to find him..."

Liu Chuan's voice unconsciously rose a few decibels. It wasn't that he was heartbroken about the thousand yuan; he was just upset that his brother had been treated like a fool.